



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on September 12, 2012

Israel and U.S. Spar Over Iran Nuclear Program

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has indicated that the United States and Israel are engaged in talks about the best approach to Iran's nuclear program. According to Netanyahu, those talks are focused on determining a "[red line](#)" for the nuclear program.



"We're discussing it right now with the United States," Netanyahu said in an interview with Canada's CBC television, aired late on Sunday, September 9.

"I don't think that they (Iran) see a clear red line, and I think the sooner we establish one, the greater the chances that there won't be a need for other types of action," Netanyahu said.

"If Iran saw that, there's a chance, I won't say it's guaranteed, but there's a chance they might pause before they cross that line."

Netanyahu is reportedly angry over Washington's failure to set clear limits on Iran's nuclear program, and contends that nations that fail to set red lines do not have a "moral right" to prevent Israel from doing so, and from striking Iran.

And Reuters reports that senior Israeli officials have briefed journalists twice in two days to rebuke the United States' policymaking. Those officials then announced that President Obama rejected an invitation to meet with Netanyahu when they are both scheduled to be in New York later this month, a statement that the White House denied, claiming it never received a request to meet with Netanyahu.

Meanwhile, the "red line" Israel is seeking to set is unclear. According to the Israeli publication *Haaretz*, Netanyahu told German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle that if Iran were to enrich uranium above 20 percent that would provide a red line since 20 percent is the maximum level necessary for civilian energy. While enrichment for a nuclear bomb must exceed 90 percent, Netanyahu contends that once Iran surpasses 20 percent, it would only take six weeks to reach 90 percent.

However, some disagree with that assessment. Reuters reports, "Many independent analysts say, however, that Iran would need additional time — from several months to a year or more — to fashion weapons-grade material into a nuclear warhead and fit onto a missile capable of delivering the payload."

While the ultimate "red line" has not been publicly announced, Netanyahu once again implied that military action may be compelled if that line is ignored.

Publicly, Washington has attempted to resist the notion of laying a clear boundary for Iran, encouraging Israel to opt for diplomacy and increased sanctions in peaceful efforts to Iran's nuclear program.

But in May, the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Daniel Shapiro, let it [slip](#) that the United States is fully prepared to engage in a military strike on Iran. "It would be preferable to resolve this diplomatically, and through the use of pressure, than to use military force," Shapiro observed, adding, "But that does not mean that option isn't available. Not just available — it's ready. The necessary planning has been



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done to ensure that it's ready."

During Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to Israel this summer, she implied that the United States has not taken a military response to Iran off the table. "We all prefer a diplomatic resolution, and Iran's leaders still have the opportunity to make the right decision," Clinton told reporters in [Jerusalem](#). "The choice is ultimately Iran's to make. Our own choice is clear: We will use all elements of American power to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon."

Clinton's assertions echoed similar sentiments articulated by President Obama in March, who said this of Iran, "I believe there is a window of time to solve this diplomatically, but that window is closing."

Obama made similar [statements](#) during a press conference with British Prime Minister David Cameron, warning that the opportunity for a diplomatic solution was "shrinking." At that time, Obama warned Tehran to use the opportunity to engage in diplomatic talks with world leaders in order to avoid "even worse consequences."

Still, Israel has been pushing for the Obama administration to make more definitive declarations regarding Iran and its nuclear program, even resorting to threats of launching a unilateral military attack on Iran's nuclear facilities if the United States failed to do so.

Israel is looking for more serious and straightforward rhetoric out of the Obama administration, states a senior Israeli official who wished to remain anonymous. "Tehran doesn't see a U.S. strike on the horizon and is confident Washington will prevent Israel from attacking," said the official.

"So Israel is looking for stronger public statements from Obama, either at the U.N. General Assembly or some other forum, that would change Iran's assessment," he added.

But Netanyahu has faced some [backlash](#) for those declarations, according to opinion polls that show a majority of Israelis do not wish to see Israel embark on a military strike without the support of the United States.

"Netanyahu is overplaying his hand and creating problems for himself with Obama. This could make life very hard for him should the president win re-election," said Alon Liel, a former director-general of the Israeli foreign ministry.

"The Israeli frustration stems from a sense that sanctions and negotiations are not as effective as they should be," said Gidi Grinstein, founder of the Reut Institute think-tank. "But Israeli action in defiance of the United States and without legitimacy is extremely risky."

Some have grown frustrated with Netanyahu's handling of the situation.

"Who are you trying to replace? The administration in Washington or that in Tehran?" said Shaul Mofaz, head of the largest opposition party, Kadima. "The world is not sick of Israel, the world is sick of Netanyahu and does not believe him."

Even Netanyahu's defense minister, Ehud Barak, has issued a statement that asserts Netanyahu should not be airing his grievances against the United States publicly. "Despite the differences and the importance of maintaining Israel's independence of action, we should also bear in mind the importance of the partnership with the United States, and try not to harm it as much as possible," he said.

Netanyahu was reportedly angered by Barak's intervention and accused him of playing politics.

"I am sorry that ... the defense minister has chosen to start his campaign at the expense of national interests and on the back of the prime minister," said Vice Prime Minister Moshe Yaalon.



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Barak denies that there is any sort of dispute between him and Netanyahu.

Photo of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: AP Images



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